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THOUGHTS

Containing four Sheets and half
of paper Duty Nine Shillings
No Christianity as Old as the Creation.

IN A

William (W)

Letter to a Member of Parliament

By

W

WILLIAMS

Rector

Devon

Prebendary

NEWTON TERRAERS

and

of Chichester.



LONDON.

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THEOLOGY



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LONDON

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SOME
THOUGHTS

ON
Christianity as Old as the Creation.

SIR,
I NOW send, what you desired, my thoughts of *Christianity as Old as the Creation*. But why should you ask this of me? I cannot think that any thing in this book has raised the least scruple in a Gentleman of your good understanding and literature; or that you believe I can solve what appears difficult to you. I take it, that you meant only to furnish me with matter for a letter; and to give me a genteel reprimand, for not being more punctual in answering yours. And see now what inconveniency your good nature has drawn upon yourself. In return, I send you a tedious epistle, which, perhaps, exceeds your privilege of a frank; and I address
A myself

myself to you, as to a favourer of the book you sent me.

I presume you take it for granted that I am no great admirer of what your Author advances; and yet, I own to you, there are some things in his book, which I don't dislike.

In the first place, I readily admit Christianity to be as old as the Creation: Tho' I explain my meaning of that proposition in a way different from his; as you will see, if you have the patience to read over these papers.

And I am far from being offended with his contending for that freedom, which now appears in this free nation. It is, to me, not only a sure mark of that liberty we enjoy; but I take it to be of great use to preserve it. The history of all nations, at least what falls under the compass of my small reading, will confirm this truth: That liberty of thought ever rose, or fell, in proportion to the liberty of the people.

The first disputes, that I have heard of, were those of the *Grecian* Philosophers, who were divided into many sects, each of which defended their opinions with much eagerness. But all these disputes owed their rise to the civil liberties of *Greece*, at that time, when it was divided into many states, and each of those were free in themselves.

Nor

Nor did these philosophers confine themselves to search the secrets of nature only. They disputed about virtue and vice, good and evil; and even about the nature of the Deity itself, which is the foundation of all religion. And I cannot but think that religion requires our greatest attention, as being that which has the strongest influence on our lives. And, therefore, I think no man ought to be blamed, for enquiring freely into that, which, confessedly, affects him most; and in which no mind can, really, be forced. Violence may compel men to an outward compliance, and make hypocrites; but it is the conviction of the mind, only, that can make real converts.

I am as well pleased, as your Author can be, that we are, as he expresses it, *debarred from all exercise of tyranny*. For if our religion cannot be maintained, as it was propagated, without force, it does not, in my opinion, deserve to be defended by any other method.

Thus far your Author and I agree very well together. If, in some other points, my notions happen to differ from his, he ought not, on his own principles, to take it amiss, that I give the reason of my dissenting from him.

But, before I do that, I cannot forbear complaining of an hard *dilemma*, that the

clergy labour under in this case. If they say nothing, your Author, and his admirers, will have sufficient matter of triumph; if they offer any thing in defence of the religion they profess, he has furnished the envious part of mankind with an answer, by saying: *They are bound, for the sake of their maintenance, to maintain those doctrines that maintain them.* If this, and much more to this purpose, which he has scattered thro' his book, is to pass for argument, it is in vain for them to offer at any defence. For, let their reasons be never so strong, this, where 'tis believed, will be much stronger. But which way can this prejudice be removed? For removed it must be, or else what they say will go for nothing. Must they give up all they possess, to prove their sincerity? Your Author will be pleased with this proof. But why must they of all mankind be singled out to do it? and not be believed on softer terms. In all other cases mens reputation rises in proportion to their substance: and why should they be the reverse of all others? and be the only men in the world, whose credit must sink, as their riches increase? But admitting they were stripped of all: tho' I say this would please your Author, yet I know it would be far from convincing him. I do not pretend to speak this out of a prophetic

prophetic spirit: tho' a small gift of prophecy will serve to foretel such an event; but I affirm it, because the proof has been made, and it will not convince him. The first clergy in the Christian church, even Christ and his Apostles, were really as poor, as your Author wishes the present clergy to be, and yet he does not believe one word of what they say.

If you ask me what other arguments can be offered to remove mens prejudices? perhaps I could shew some, if this were a proper place. But if I dwell long here, you will think, that this is the only thing I dislike in the book. And, therefore, to avoid prolixity, I offer this, as the shortest method I can think of, *viz.* that you would recollect all the clergy of your acquaintance, and, from your best observation, judge, impartially, whether they be not, in all their dealings, as fair as the rest of their neighbours, except in matters of tithes, and church-leases? And even there, whether they be more exacting, than the lay lords, and parsons? I am not acquainted with very many clergymen: but from the few, I know, and from the general method of their education, and employment, I will venture to put the proof of their sincerity on this foot; and to appeal to the people, whether they find the clergy to be such men, as your Author represents them. When

When you desired my opinion of this book, I take it for granted, you did not intend to impose upon me the drudgery of following the Author thro' every chapter : Such a work must needs be both tedious, and incoherent : To avoid which, I have chosen to examine one proposition, *viz.*

“ That true religion, in all places, and times, must ever be the same, eternal, universal and unalterable *.”

This he sometimes expresses by being *absolutely perfect*, sometimes, *to which nothing can be added*, and other equivalent phrases, which amount to this.

That the religion of reason was a true religion, and always the same, even before the publication of the Gospel.

This is the foundation of his work ; and, if this be faulty, the whole superstructure must fall to the ground.

There can be no ambiguity in the terms of this proposition, except in the word *Religion* : And, therefore, to let you see I do not mistake your Author's meaning, I shall transcribe a passage, or two.

B. “ † That we may the better know whether the law, or religion of nature is universal, and the Gospel a republication of it, and not a new religion, I

* Cap. 13.

† Cap. 2.

“ desire

“ desire you would give me a definition
 “ of the religion of nature.

A. “ By natural religion I understand
 “ the belief of the existence of a God,
 “ and the sense and practice of those du-
 “ ties, which result from the knowledge
 “ we, by our reason, have of him, and
 “ his perfections; and of ourselves, and
 “ our imperfections; and of the relation
 “ we stand in to him, and our fellow-
 “ creatures: So that the religion of nature
 “ takes in every thing that is founded on
 “ the reason, and nature of things. Again:
 “ * The latter part of the Doctor’s
 “ [Clark’s] discourse is chiefly levelled
 “ against those, he calls the true Deists,
 “ and that you may know what sort of
 “ men they are, he combats, he gives you
 “ their creed.

“ These Deists have just notions of God,
 “ and of all the divine attributes, in eve-
 “ ry respect, who declare they believe,
 “ there is one, eternal, infinite, intelligent,
 “ all-powerful, and all-wise Being, the
 “ creator, preserver, and governor, of all
 “ things. That this supreme Cause is a
 “ being of infinite justice, goodness, and
 “ truth, and all other moral, as well as
 “ natural perfections. That he made the
 “ world, for the manifestation of his power,

• Chap. 14.

“ and

“ and wisdom, and to communicate his
 “ goodness and happiness to his creatures.
 “ That he preserves it by his continual,
 “ all-wise providence ; and governs it ac-
 “ cording to the eternal rules of infinite
 “ justice, equity, goodness, mercy, and
 “ truth.

Then follows the duty of rational crea-
 tures to God, their fellow-creatures, and
 themselves. After which it ends thus.

“ Lastly, That, according as men re-
 “ gard, or neglect these obligations, so they
 “ are, proportionably, acceptable, or dis-
 “ pleasing to God, who being supreme
 “ Governor of all the world, cannot but
 “ testify his favour, or displeasure, at some
 “ time or other: and, consequently, since
 “ this is not done in the present state,
 “ therefore there must be a future state, of
 “ rewards and punishments, in the life to
 “ come.”

Your Author adds immediately: “ The
 “ Deists no doubt will own that the Doc-
 “ tor has done them justice:” And he
 concludes that section in these words: “ If
 “ princes required no more of their sub-
 “ jects, and private men of their neigh-
 “ bours, than to be governed by these
 “ principles, how happy would the world
 “ be thus governed?”

I have made this long transcript to let
 you see, that by *religion* your Author un-
 derstands

derstands *the true Deists creed*, as he calls it. Now, if he be consistent with himself, and keeps to his own definition, as all good disputants should, it will thence follow that, when he says *true religion was always the same*, he means, that all men, at all times, even before the publication of the Gospel, did believe this creed without any variation.

I shall therefore apply myself to enquire, what was the state of religion, at the time that the Gospel was published.

Your Author has spared me the trouble of a long search, by recommending, in his preface, two pieces of *Tully*, in these words, "The manner of debating a subject dialogue wise (as this between *A.* and *B.*) was esteemed by the antients the most proper, as well as most prudent way of exposing prevailing absurdities: And *Tully's* two discourses, *De Nat. Deor.* and *De Divinat.* both levelled against the superstition of his countrymen, are living monuments of the expediency, and usefulness of this way of writing."

This direction in the preface made me read over those two books. Nor could he have recommended a better author to prove his assertion, in case it be true, *that religion was always the same*. For *Tully*, in an advanced age, when his judgment was come to full maturity, collected the

substance of the *Grecian* philosophy, with regard to religion, as it stood in his time, and published it in the *Latin* tongue, for the use of his countrymen. And this he did not long before the birth of Christ : So that you may see in these books, as it were in one view, what was the state of religion in, at least, the then known world, at the time that Christianity began.

The book *De Nat. Deor.* contains the relation of a dispute, concerning the being and attributes of God, between three philosophers, *Velleius* an *Epicurean*, *Balbus* a *Stoic*, and *Cotta* an *Academic* : *Cicero* was only auditor.

Here permit me just to mention, that *Tully*, in all his dialogues, makes his actors speak up to the parts they are to act. He fairly puts into their mouths all the notions, the sect they represented, maintained ; and places their arguments in the clearest light. One might have expected that your author's speakers *A.* and *B.* would have imitated *Cotta*, and *Balbus* : I do not mean in the style ; for few, if any, can write, as *Cicero* did : Nor am I offended with a philosopher, that he writes not like an orator, provided he writes intelligibly. But, tho' I guessed *A.* to be the favourite, and that consequently he was to make the best figure ; yet, methinks,
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an imitator of *Tully's* dialogues should have done justice to poor *B.* the believer. But, on the contrary, tho', I confess, not much to my surprize, *B.* is generally introduced, either assenting to what *A.* dictates; or, what is worse, making silly objections. *Tully* would have called *B.* for so doing, a prevaricator. But *B.* is a creature of your Author's own making, and, therefore, he has a right to do with him as he pleases.

Cicero inscribes his book to *Brutus*, which begins thus, or to this effect. There are many points in philosophy, not as yet sufficiently explained: but the most difficult, as you *Brutus* know very well, and the obscurest question, is that concerning the nature of the Gods, which gives the greatest entertainment to the mind, and is the director of all religion. About which there are such a variety of clashing opinions, as will sufficiently justify the prudence of the *Academics*, in withholding their assent from things that are uncertain. As in this question: most men have said there are Gods: *Protagoras* doubted it; but *Diagoras*, and *Theodorus* thought there were none at all. And even they, who said there were Gods, are split into such a variety of jangling opinions, that it would be a troublesome piece of work, barely to reckon up their different sentiments. For much is said about the shape

of the Gods, the place of their abode, and what they do: concerning all which the philosophers contend with the utmost dissention.

But the whole stress of the cause seems to me to lie here: Whether the Gods be entirely idle, and trouble not themselves with the administration of things; or whether, on the contrary, all things were made by them in the beginning, and are eternally governed by them. And herein opinions have chiefly differed. If this point be not determined, men must be involved in the greatest error, and ignorance. For there are, and have been some philosophers, who held that the Gods take no care of human affairs. But if this opinion be true, what piety can there be? what holiness? what religion? For if we believe that the Gods hear our prayers, and take care of us, divine worship is due to them: but if they neither will, nor can help us; nor trouble themselves with what we do, what reason can there be why we should pray to them? And, if you take away piety towards the Gods, I doubt, that you, at the same time, take away all faith, and society among men; and even justice itself, that most excellent virtue. But there are other considerable philosophers, who not only hold, that all the world is governed by the mind and reason

son of the Gods; but that they also consult, and provide for the life of man. For they think that the immortal Gods give to men corn, and whatever else the earth produces, and the seasons, and that weather, whereby the fruits of the earth are ripened: and they make many other conclusions: insomuch that the immortal Gods seem, in a manner, to be fabricated for the use of men. To all which *Carnades* has made objections, enough to raise in men that are not over run with laziness, a desire of finding out truth.

This is an abridgment of part of *Cicero's* introduction to this dialogue. If I have represented him wrong, you can, and I expect your Author will set me right, in the most public manner. I do not pretend to come up to the beauty of the original: I doubt whether your Author can. But, since he has made *Cicero* the text, I would desire him to give the *English* world a translation of *Tully's* philosophical pieces, stamped with his own authority, to prevent those abuses in translations, he complains of.

If I understand this introduction, and what your Author has written, there is a wide difference between *Tully* and him already: which, to me, presages no good agreement hereafter. Your Author affirms roundly, " that his true religion must be
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“ in all places and times, for ever the
 “ same, universal, unchangeable, unalter-
 “ able ; and such as every intelligent crea-
 “ ture have sufficient understanding to dis-
 “ cover, and abilities to comply with.”
 Whereas *Tully* says, that men had, as far
 back as he could trace it, ever disputed,
 not only about the worship, but about
 the providence, and about even the very
 being of God.

The first who speaks is the *Epicurean*.
 When your Author says, this book is *le-
 velled against the superstition of those times*,
 he must mean either that part of it, which
 contains the *Epicurean* doctrine ; or what
 the *Academic* says against the *Stoics* : and
 I leave him to chuse which he pleases.
 But I own to you I am of opinion he
 chiefly meant the *Epicurean*. For, as he
 observes, *good wits will jump, though never
 so distant in time*. And see the agreement
 between these two. Your Author shews
 himself, in many places an inveterate ene-
 my to superstition ; *Epicurus* made it his
 boast, that his doctrine would effectually
 cure men of it. Your Author thinks it
 not prudent to attack plainly a reigning
 superstition, without some softening expres-
 sions, when it is not safe to talk other-
 wise ; *Epicurus* really disbelieved the very
 being of the Gods, and all that he said
 of them, was only for fear of falling un-
 der

der the censure of the *Athenians*. Your Author sets up the same principle of action, that *Epicurus* did, before him, viz. self-interest. And, to run the parallel no farther, both these wits agree in applauding themselves, and despising their adversaries, The substance of the *Epicurean* scheme, as delivered here by *Velleius*, is as followeth.

He believes there are Gods: that they are eternal, and happy, having nothing to do themselves, nor troubling others: that the Gods are in the shape of men: that shape is not a body, but as it were a body; and that it has not blood, but as it were blood: that their life is most happy, for God does nothing, and employs himself about nothing; but rejoices in his own wisdom, and virtue, and is assured that he shall enjoy the greatest pleasures, and that eternally: that the world was made by the fortuitous concurrence of atoms: that the effect of this belief is to free men from that everlasting Lord, which the *Stoics* had imposed on mens necks, and which they feared night and day: for who will not fear a busy prying God, who thinks it his business to inspect and govern all things: but that the Gods are to be worshipped, for the excellency of their nature.

This is the *Epicurean* creed. That this was a prevailing opinion in the world in
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the time that *Cicero* wrote this, or very soon after is evident from a passage of your *Author's own producing: and, therefore, I need take no pains to prove it. Now, if the times of *Augustus* were inclining to *Atheism*: or, in other words, if the *Augustan* age was *Epicurean* (for that I take to be meant by inclining to *Atheism*, and so does your Author too, when he says, that the *Epicureans* were censured as *Atheists*) here must have been a great breach in your Author's unalterable religion. For how is it possible that all men, in all ages, should be of his faith, if, what he alledges, be true, that the times of *Augustus* were inclinable to *Atheism*?

Before I part with the *Epicureans* give me leave just to mention to you, that your Author says, they had exalted notions of their God: and *Cotta* owns that *Epicurus* wrote a book of devotion. No doubt but your Author laments the loss of so curious a piece. For he, who had exalted notions of God, must needs have had exalted strains of devotion. But I would not have you grieve much, at the loss, whatever your Author may: for *Cotta* calls this *Epicurean* liturgy the dull banter of a libertine scribbler: for how, says he, can there be any devotion, if there be no

* Chap. 8.

providence?

providence? and he adds: he thought *Posidonius* in the right, who said that *Epicurus* was really an Atheist; but pretended religion, to avoid being prosecuted.

To their boast, of freeing men from superstition, and the fear of death, *Cotta* answers: that the *Epicureans*, to his knowledge, did prostrate themselves before every petty statue: and that he never knew any, who stood in greater dread, than the *Epicureans*, of those two things, which *Epicurus* said, ought not to be feared at all, that is death, and the Gods. And, if report be true, this was the very case of *Hobbs*. Perhaps, a probable account may be given of these, seeming, inconsistencies: but that is not my business at present.

I proceed now to seek for your Author's religion among the *Stoics*: and yet, I am in a doubt whether he refers us there to seek for it. For the *Stoics* were the only superstitious, then in being, that pretended to any learning; whereas, your Author, you know, hates superstition.

The *Stoics* made a great deal more of the matter than the *Epicureans*. For, *Epicurus*, as *Tully* observes, was a man of no great capacity, and an entire stranger to all sorts of learning. The little, he knew, he borrowed from *Democritus*, who had advanced the doctrine of atoms: and, what he pretended to mend in him, he

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made

made really worse, by introducing the declination of atoms. For the rest: he judged of every thing by the senses: so that, for example, he took the sun to be just as it appeared to the eye, a body of two foot diameter, or thereabouts. *Epicurus* used to boast that he had no master: to which *Cotta* replied, he believed no man sooner. His followers, in imitation of their leader, affected to count nothing learning, but what contributed to their pleasures. No wonder, then, that they advanced nothing, but such notions, as were, to speak in your Author's phrase, within the reach of all men, at all times: that is, gross notions of a Deity, and strong desires of sensual pleasure.

But the *Stoics*, following their master *Zeno*, a man of quick parts, and an excellent logician, were not contented with vulgar notions. They furnished themselves with all the learning of those, that went before them; and made, as they thought, the best use of their reason, improved by Logic, to avoid error, and discover truth. And, now, let us see, what these masters of reason produced, assisted with all the learning of about six hundred years, viz. from the time of *Thales*, the father of the *Ionic* philosophers, to the sixty third year of *Cicero's* life, when he collected what the *Stoics* had wrote on the
nature

nature of the Deity. Sure we may expect to find here, that, which, your Author says, *all men knew, at all times*. For what was obvious to the meanest capacity, could not, methinks, escape all these nice reasoners.

The *Stoics* divided their disputation about the Deity into these four questions, Whether there was a Deity? What was his nature? Whether he governed the world? And, Whether he presided over human affairs?

Balbus, who represents the *Stoics*, proves the being of a God by a great variety of arguments, with which I shall not swell these papers. But, when he comes under his second head, to describe his God, you will find it to be nothing else but the whole world. Are you not surprized to hear this, after all the fine things your Author has said about the religion of reason?

But, to convince you that I mistake not; *Balbus* is very angry with *Epicurus*, because he pretends not to understand, *Qualis sit volubilis et rotundus Deus*, what sort of Deity his round rolling God was. But he is so far from denying the charge, that he seriously defends the excellency of a spherical figure; and then upbraids *Epicurus* for his ignorance in Mathematicks. This fixes the idea, which the *Stoics* had

of the Deity, to the utmost certainty. They imagined then, that that vast expanse, which we, in a clear night, see thick set with stars, did, like a large shell, of a globular form, inclose the whole world, and was itself a part of it: all this together, shell and kernel, they took to be the Deity.

See now what a God the *Stoics*, with all their reasoning, found out! Can you believe your own eyes? It was not for want of sense, or literature, that these men did not make that figure in divinity, our modern wits do. I will venture to say, that some, at least, of the *Stoics* were men of as good capacities, of as clear conceptions, of as strong reasoning, and of as great application, as any in this curious age, not excepting your learned Author himself.

But, if your Author does not like this God, the *Stoics* can furnish him with many more. For they, as well as the *Epicureans*, had them in great plenty. The *Stoics* held, that, besides the world, several parts of it were Deities: as the stars, especially the planets, whose divinity they proved from the irregularity of their motion. The sky was *Jupiter*, the air *Juno*, the sea *Neptune*, and the earth *Pluto*: Then they made Gods of men, who had been great benefactors to mankind,

kind, as *Ceres*, *Bacchus*, and others: and they deified some excellencies, as virtue, honour, and the like.

The *Stoics*, as I said, divided their disputations about the Deity into four questions. I have mentioned two, the remaining are these: Whether there be a Providence? And, Whether it concerns it self with human affairs. Both which they held in the affirmative, and defended them, as usual with their best arguments. For the *Stoics* penetrated, as far as they could, with the assistance of bare reason, into the knowledge of things. And yet, after all their penetration, with regard to Providence in general, this was their opinion: That the Gods took care of great matters, but neglected small things. And, with regard to Providence, concerning it self with human affairs, *Balbus* says: Thus the mind acquires a knowledge of the Gods, from thence arises piety, from thence justice, and other virtues, and from thence comes an happy life, which makes us like the Gods, and equal to them in every thing *but immortality*, which is no ingredient of an happy life.

Here the *Stoics* declare themselves flatly against the soul's immortality. Had they suspected any such thing, this was the place to insert it, in answer to the trite objection against Providence, taken from the

the unequal distributions of the things of this life.

But they were so far from arguing in that manner, that, in the very entrance of this discourse, when *Balbus* began to prove the existence of a Deity, he says: If we had not these notions fixed in our minds, they could not have continued there to this day. For we see that other notions, without foundation, are worn out with time. Who now believes there ever were such creatures as an *Hippocentaur*, or a *Chimera*? Or where can you find an old woman so stupid, as to be now afraid of those torments of hell, which were once a part of our forefathers belief?

And farther to confirm that the *Stoics* gave up all notions of immortality, as a story too dull for an old wife; the *Academics* banter them, for their saying, in defence of a Providence, that if a man escaped out of the hands of God by death, yet the power of the Gods could reach his children, and even his posterity.

Your Author says, that *Cicero*, as a philosopher not only knew, but spoke the truth; tho', as a priest, thought fit to dissemble. It is foreign to my purpose to examine into the truth of this distinction. I give your learned Author leave, for the present, to make the best use of it.

I confess

I confess that *Cicero* puts such *softening expressions*, as your Author talks of, into the mouth of *Cotta*, when he answers *Balbus*: And I readily grant that he did it, for the reasons assigned by your Author; because *he supposed it not prudent so plainly to attack the reigning superstition*: that is the religion of his country. But there was no need of all this caution, when he makes *Balbus* deliver the sentiments of the *Stoics*: for that was, to use your Author's language, the superstition that then reigned. And therefore he was at full liberty to speak his mind freely; as indeed he does. And he faithfully collects all their arguments. Had he not; his *Balbus* would have been as ill used, as a modern philosopher, whose name begins with the same letter. But *Cicero* was above such low artifice: he ever did justice, at least, to the cause he undertook.

Let then *Cicero's* opinion, as philosopher, or priest, as your Author calls him, be what he pleases; for I have no dispute with him about that. All I now ask of you, or of him, rather, is, whether *Cicero* did not make here a fair collection of the then prevailing opinions of the *Grecian* philosophers? I will take it for granted, till I meet with reasons to convince me to the contrary: And upon supposition it is true, give me leave to observe,

serve, that you have in this book the whole belief of those, who lived at the time it was wrote. The *Epicureans*, you see, had but a very short creed, consisting really, at the best, but of this one article: I believe there is a God. The *Stoics* went farther, and believed a God, and his Providence: but denied the soul's immortality, and, consequently, rewards and punishments in a future state.

The *Stoics* were angry with the *Epicureans*, for believing their God to be in human shape, and yet without body or blood: The *Epicureans*, in their turn, made a jest of the *Stoics* rolling God. These were the only two sects, if we may believe *Cicero*, that, in that age, contended about the Deity. For the *Academic* laughed at them both. This is, in short, the substance of *Tully de Nat. Deor.*

The other book, *De Divinat.* recommended by your Author, was wrote, as a supplement to the former. For prediction, which is one of the *Stoical* arguments for a Deity, is but just mentioned by *Balbus*: the author designing it for a separate treatise.

This dialogue is between the two *Cicero's*. *Quintus* defends divination, as a *Stoic*: *Marcus* acts his own character, of an *Academic*, and refutes the other's arguments.

Quintus

Quintus divides divination into two sorts : artificial and natural. Under artificial he places these six kinds : Inspecting the entrails of beasts : prodigies : thunder and lightning : augury : astrology : lots. Under the second head he places dreams, and oracles. But what is all this to us now ? I am persuaded there is no Christian, now in *England*, of the least insight in learning, who maintains any one of these several sorts of divination, except astrology, which, I own, is cried up by some of the common almanac makers. But they profess themselves to be as great enemies to Popery, and as good friends to the government as your Author : So that I cannot see what reason he has to be angry with these men. Besides, this argument has been already exhausted, by the learned *Bickerstaff*, when he turned *Partridge's* predictions against himself. Indeed *Partridge* attempted to prove himself alive, after *Bickerstaff's* predictions had killed him : but *Bickerstaff's* reply was unanswerable, and there that dispute rested, 'till your Author revived it.

But your Author is a man of too much sense to imagine, that we are all running mad after fortune-tellers. This is not the superstition he would cure us of : and he tells us plain enough what it is. The method he takes to cure us is, to assert, *that religion was at all times the same, and*

perfect. By reading over these two books, at his recommendation, I find the fact to be quite otherwise in *Tully's* days. For all mankind were then, either over-run with gross superstition, or inclining to Atheism.

You will perhaps tell me, that, be that as it will, yet your Author has proved his point by unanswerable arguments, drawn from the being and attributes of God. I shall therefore now consider his arguments. But first I would desire you to remember what *Hudibras* says:

No argument like matter of fact is.

And I think it is a safe rule to walk by. For I may be able to judge of a fact, tho' I have not logic enough to discover false reasoning.

Your Author's grand proposition is this: *That the religion of reason must, in all places, and times, be true, and ever the same.* His argument to prove it is taken from the being and attributes of God, which, in short, is this: .

If there be a Being of infinite perfection, knowledge, wisdom, goodness, &c. that cannot be deceived himself, or willing to deceive men, he has given men a true religion, &c. but there is such a Being. *Ergo.*

Your

Your Author cannot say I misrepresent him here. For, if I understand what he writes, this is what runs thro' his whole work, tho' diversified, in different parts, with a great plenty of words. These are *the weighty arguments, new to B.* which convinced him, *that religion was always the same.*

Tho' this way of arguing be new to *B.* yet sure it is not so to the learned *A.* If it be, it is, to me, a proof, against what he has been proving. For, if no body discovered these arguments, before *A.* one might suspect him to be the inventor of his old religion. If religion was always the same, the reasons for it should be the same too, and especially for a religion, that is nothing else but the result of reason.

But let us now examine these new arguments. For, as they are new, who knows but that they may burst in the proof, as other new engines of terror sometimes do. I will own to you, that *A.* himself directed me to make the proof, by recommending *Tully de Divinat.* where I met with the following argument. I told you before that *Quintus* takes the part of the *Stoics*, and *Marcus* of the *Academics.* *Quintus* in defence of divination argues thus.

If there be a God, and if his providence directs all things, and takes care of human affairs, then, of necessity he must

foretel future events : but there is a God,
&c. Ergo. Again :

If there be a God, and if he does not foretel future events, it must be for one of these reasons. Either he does not love men : or he is ignorant of what will happen : or he thinks it not for the interest of men to know what is to come : or that it is beneath his Majesty to foretel : or he really cannot foretel things to come. But God loves men : for he is a gracious God : nor can he be ignorant of what he has preordained : It is our interest to know things to come : for it will put us on our guard : nor is prediction beneath the Majesty of God : for nothing is more excellent than beneficence : and God cannot but fore-know future events : therefore he does foretel things to come.

This is the *Stoics* argument to prove divination : and give me leave to ask you, Whether you think it strong enough, to bring mankind back, to search for their fate in the entrails of a beast ; or to direct their conduct from the flight of a bird, and to re-establish all that heathenish superstition, which has been long since exploded, and forgot ?

Your Author's argument, to prove *his unalterable religion*, is nothing else but a transcript of this. Pray compare them together. Put *true religion* instead of divination,

nation, make a little allowance for the difference of expression, between the concise dry stile of the *Stoics*, and the loose flourish of a Free-thinker, and I fancy you will find it the very same argument, differently applied.

But what if it be, you will say. It is, for all that, a proof of an unalterable religion. I grant it: which I hope will please you. And from thence we must both conclude, if you be as obliging to me, as I am to you, that fortune-telling, and your Author's *unalterable religion* ever were, are, and will be. But how do we get rid of superstition by this? For fortune-telling is upon as good a foot as this *unalterable religion*: And I make no doubt but your Author will say, that fortune-telling is the grossest superstition, except one, that ever perplexed mankind.

But, besides fortune-telling which the *Stoics* have proved to my hand, I will engage, as bad a disputant as I am, by pointing this argument to different objects, to prove twenty other odd things, as well as your Author has proved his religion: As, for example, that he is infallible: and the like. *Asgil*, you know, proved, that he should never die. These arguments, which, like Quacks salves, are good for every thing, are really good for nothing. And, if they be over-loaded, and generally they
are

are so by those, who use them unskillfully, they recoil, and not only do no good, but much harm.

Observe how *Cicero* answers his brother's invincible argument. Ye *Stoics*, says he, by this way of arguing, give the *Epicureans* an handle to jest upon you, who, in truth, are more consistent with themselves than the *Stoics* are. For they say, God troubles not himself about us, and consequently foretels nothing; whereas your God may govern the world, and not foretel. Why then do ye cramp yourselves with those arguments, which ye can never explain? When ye would shorten the dispute ye argue thus. If there be a God, there is divination. But it is more probable that there is no divination, and that therefore there is no God. See now how rashly they go to work: for, according to them, if there be no divination, there must be no God.

Let us bring this home. Here is a more pompous argument, dressed up by your Author in its best colours, to prove that the *religion of reason was always the same*. The being, and all the attributes of God are pawned as a proof of it: and, by the management of the argument, we must, either part with God, and all his attributes, or allow *an unalterable religion*. I believe that, what I have already said, shews

shews that religion has not been always the same. I make no doubt but your own reading has furnished you with like observations. But I need not go farther than this very book. For your Author is so good as to furnish those, who want, with proofs enough of this sort. I shall repeat but two, “ * Superstition has spread
“ itself over the face of the whole earth,
“ and prevailed, more or less, at all times
“ and places.” In proof of which he quotes this very book, *De Divinitat*. And again:
“ There never was a time, or place, where
“ some external revelation was not be-
“ lieved, and its votaries equally confident,
“ that theirs was the true revelation.”

This is your Author's method. With one breath he presses very warmly: *That if there be a God, &c. there must be one unvariable religion*: With the next he very gravely tells us, that religion has ever been varying: and then leaves you to make the inference.

But he will tell you, that his religion is nothing else but the result of reason, which he calls *the religion of reason*: that this religion is perfect, as coming from the Author of all perfection: and that the variety of external revelations do no way disprove the unalterableness of this religion.

Chap. 11.

But

But what, if, upon examination, human reason should not be found perfect? then the result of that reason cannot be perfect. And can any one, who has made any improvement of his own reason, impose so far on himself, as to think that human reason is perfect? Is his own reason perfect? He, who thinks so, sufficiently refutes himself: And, if your Author be full of that conceit, I need go no farther than himself to seek for an answer to all he says, under that head.

Every man, who converses with his own species, must observe an infinite variety in mens faculties. I once heard a great man say, that he thought, there were as many different capacities in human souls, as there are moves in a chess-board. Perhaps it is impossible to find two men exactly of the same size of understanding. For my part, when I consider the diversity of capacities in men, otherwise of equal advantages, I cannot forbear thinking, that this difference lies in the soul, which is the seat of reason: and that, as the all-wise Creator has adorned the visible creation, with a wonderful variety of beings, in a regular gradation, from the lowest degree of vegetative life, up to man; so he has made a like gradation in human souls. For we see some men, that are but just removed from brutes, and distinguished from them, scarcely, by any thing, but shape; whereas
others

others shine like angels. Wherever the seat of this difference lies the difference is manifest, and owned by your Author.

What must we say then of all these different faculties? Are they all equal? I fancy your Author will hardly say that. If they be not, then, according to him, each of these men must have a different religion, in proportion to their different degrees of reason: and every one, of this infinite multitudes of religions, must be the same, and equally true, perfect, and incapable of any alteration.

There lies a fallacy in your Author's argument, drawn from the perfection of God, to the perfection of human reason. It does not necessarily follow, that because there is a God of infinite perfection, therefore the *religion of reason is perfect*. The fallacy lies in supposing, that a voluntary efficient cause must always produce the same necessary effect. If this be not clear enough, I will explain my meaning by this familiar example.

Tompion, you know, was an ingenious clock-maker, and invented the eight day clock. Suppose the argument ran thus.

Tompion makes eight day clocks, therefore every clock, of *Tompion's* making, must be an eight day clock.

Here you may indulge your fancy, if you please, in running over all the divisions

fions of your Author's argument, to prove that *Tompion's* clocks must be all eight day clocks: but you cannot avoid seeing, at the same time, the absurdity of this way of arguing. Must *Tompion*, of necessity, make all his clocks to go just eight days, and no longer, because he found out a method to make them go so long? Could he not still make clocks, that wanted winding up every day, which was the old fashion? or could he not make a clock to go no longer than an hour-glass? And, on the contrary, could he not, by the same rule, that he made one clock to go a week, make another to go a month, and another a year? The only just inference you can make from *Tompion's* excellency in clock-work, even if he were perfect in his way, is only this, that every piece, which came out of his hands, would go, as long as he intended it should go, and no longer, whether that was a day, a week, or a year,

Let us apply this simile to God. Supposing God to be an agent entirely free, and allowing that he has given men faculties, by the use of which they can come to some knowledge of him, must it thence, necessarily, follow, that he has given all men such faculties, that they can all, by the bare use of those faculties, without any other assistance, come to the same knowledge

knowledge of God? or that God neither can, nor will manifest the knowledge of himself to man any other way?

This must be his conclusion, if there be any necessary connection between the perfection of God, and the perfection of human reason. A plant, or a brute, were they capable of arguing, might argue in the same manner, and prove themselves endued with as perfect reason as your Author: because they, as well as himself, are the work of an all-perfect Creator. The inference from the power to the will was never allowed to be a just inference. I readily grant, that the Omnipotent can do every thing; but, at the same time, I utterly deny, that he has made all *Free-thinkers* good logicians.

Your Author makes use of another * argument, which I shall examine next, *viz. That the religion of reason is perfect, because it was before any traditional religion.*

This, if true, might perhaps appear plausible. But I do not see that he proves his assumption any other way, than by forcing simple B. to own, that, *before any traditional religion commenced mankind had a religion, which, as coming from the Author of all perfection, must as worthy of its di-*

* Chap. 13.

vine original be wholly perfect. I cannot be so complaisant as to admit of all this: and therefore I call upon him to prove what he asserts. For, I think, I can make it appear, that religion of reason was not before any traditional religion.

And in proof of this I might urge an unexceptionable authority, even his learned self against himself, who says: *There never was a time or place, where some external religion was not believed.* For if this be true; and it is his own assertion: then, of necessity, the religion of reason could not exist before traditional religion commenced, unless it had a being before there was either time or place. But I shall not insist on this: the pages where these two passages lie are at a great distance from one another.

To avoid that confusion, which may arise, from using a variety of sounds to express the same idea, as your copious Author does, it will be necessary to put you in mind that he makes these words, *external, traditional, instituted, revealed religion, and revelation* to signify the same thing.

Your Author says that the religion of reason was before any revealed religion. I say, that revealed religion was before the religion of reason,

By

By which I do not mean, that God gave man religion before he gave reason: for man must have the use of his rational faculties, before he can attend to any single proposition, by whomsoever revealed: but I say this;

That God revealed his will to man, or, in other words, gave him a religion, before man began to reason about it, or even to convince himself, by the use of his reason, that there was a God.

Your Author tells us that ** the meaning of words are perpetually changing*: and in proof of it says: *To give one remarkable instance of this nature: the primitive fathers did not believe a spirit to be immaterial, but only a thinner sort of body: and this they did not only apply to the souls of men, and angels, but they thought that God himself was corporeal.* By this he intends both to expose the fathers, and at the same time to shew that he himself has right notions of a Spirit, and that he holds God, and human souls, to be immaterial substances.

I do not dispute the notion, for I allow it to be the groundwork of true religion. But I desire to know of him how he came by it? Was it from reason, or revelation? If he says from reason, as I suppose he will: you may guess, from the

doctrine of the *Stoics*, not to mention the *Epicureans*, how unlikely reason, left to it self, was to discover it. But, whatever answer he may give to this question, I hope to convince you, that this very doctrine, that God and human souls are immaterial substances, proceeded originally from revelation.

I shall not offer any thing, in proof of what I assert, out of a book, of so little credit with your Author, as the Holy Scriptures. But I shall produce an authority, which he cannot except to, even that very * *Tully*, whom he recommends.

Velleius, in order to establish the *Epicurean* God, enumerates the several opinions of the ancients concerning the Deity, beginning with the earliest accounts he could meet with: and endeavours, as well as he can, to refute them: from whence I have selected these few passages.

Thales the *Milesian*, who first searched after these matters, that is the nature of the Gods, said, that water was the beginning of things, and that God was that *mens*, mind, or spirit, which formed all things out of water.

It seems the *Grecians* esteemed *Thales* to be the inventor of this notion. But it bears so near a resemblance to the *Mosaic*

* De Nat. Deor.

account,

account, that an unprejudiced person, ignorant of Chronology, will be apt to think, that, either one borrowed this notion from the other, or that both drew it from the same common original. *Thales** was a *Phœnician*, by birth, or, at least, by extraction. He flourished Olympiad 41. about 870 years after the law was delivered by *Moses*.

That I translate the word *mens* properly into Spirit, and that by it was then understood an immaterial substance, is evident from *Velleius*'s remark upon the word. *Si dii possunt esse sine sensu, mentem † cur aquæ adjunxit, si ipsa mens constare potest vacans corpore?* And again, speaking of the opinion of *Anaxagoras*, who held that all things were made by an infinite mind, he says: *Aperta, simplexque mens, nulla re adjuncta, quæ sentire possit, fugere intelligentiæ nostræ vim, & notionem videtur.* Tho' a sensual *Epicurean* could not form to himself a notion of a pure, and simple being, without a body, which is the very definition of a spirit; yet he is a very good evidence, that it was believed in former times.

Pythagoras, he says, held God to be a soul, stretched out, and penetrating thro' all nature. To which *Velleius* answers,

* *Diogenes Laert. Helvic. Chro.*

† In my edition I read *Et men'e* but that being contrary to the sense of the Author, I venture to change it into *mentem*.

thus :

thus : *Quomodo porro Deus esse, si nihil esset nisi animus, aut infixus, aut infusus esset in mundo?* If God be nothing but a Spirit, how can he be either infused thro' the world or fixed in any part of it? This is a proper answer for an *Epicurean*, who admitted nothing besides body *; But it is at the same time a full concession that *Pythagoras* believed God to be an immaterial substance.

To mention but one evidence more to this point : *Velleius* admits, that *Plato* held God to be *ἄσώματος* : tho' he thinks an unbodied God to be unintelligible: and assigns a reason for it worthy an *Epicurean*, viz. That a God, without a body, must, of necessity, want sense, want prudence, want pleasure.

I have collected these passages, only to shew, that the idea, which the ancients fixed to the word *mens*, was that of an immaterial substance.

Here I would observe, that the doctrine of *Thales* was plain, and in a few words, agreeable to the Holy Scriptures : but that the succeeding philosophers, who agreed with him, in affirming God to be a spirit, added to that belief, other doctrines inconsistent with it.

I will give you one instance of this, in *Velleius's* remarks upon *Plato* : to speak of those inconsistencies would, says he, take

* Τὸ πᾶν ἐστὶ σῶμα. Laert. in vita Epic.

up much Time. For in his *Timæus* he says, that the father of this world could not be named: and in his book of laws he thinks, that we ought not to enquire what God is: and yet he tells us, in both those books, that the world was God, and heaven, and the stars, and earth, and souls, and those we received from our ancestors. Which things, as he observes, are, not only false, in themselves, but very repugnant to each other.

The old Academy, and the Peripatetics, held much the same opinion with *Plato*. For, as *Cicero* observes *, they said, there was an eternal, and most perfect mind, or spirit, which they called *the soul of the world*, and God: and yet, as *Velleius* remarks, *Aristotle* makes much confusion, in his third book of Philosophy. For sometimes he assigns all divinity to the mind: sometimes he says the world itself is God, and sometimes the heat of heaven; not considering that heaven is part of that world, which in another place he had made to be God.

Thus the traditional doctrine, that God was a pure spirit, an immaterial substance, remained among the *Greeks*, tho' much incumber'd since the days of *Thales*. But when *Zeno* by the dint of argument proved, † that nothing but a body could act, or

* Ac. q. l. 1.

† Ac. q. l. 1.

be acted upon, the notion of God's being a spirit quite vanished, and, in his stead, they introduced a gross Deity, evident to the senses, as I have already observed.

What helped to bring the divinity of the *Stoics* into contempt, and to make, what was bad in itself, much worse, was the new Academy begun by *Arcefilas*, who bantred *Zeno*. And the followers of *Arcefilas*, particularly *Carneades*, sufficiently exposing the absurd notions of the *Stoics*, as you may see, in *Cotta's* answer to *Balbus*; this effectually opened a way for the impious fancies of *Epicurus*, whose doctrine, both in divinity, and morality, were but too agreeable to the corrupt inclinations of men.

Admitting then this to be fact, and I produce his own author in confirmation of it; I would desire your author to solve this phenomenon in divinity, on his own principles: and it is well worth his while to attempt it. For it will strongly confirm his hypothesis, if he can make it plainly appear, how *reason* could at first trace out, that God is a spirit, and afterwards quite destroy that notion, and yet be consistent with itself, and still be unvariably the same. In the mean time my way of accounting for it is thus.

That

That God, from the creation of the world, or in the beginning, did shew to our first parents that, which may be known of him, or as much as it was convenient for man to know, even his eternal power, in creating the world, and his Godhead, or divine spiritual nature: that this belief continued long uncorrupt, till men became so vain, as to mingle their own imaginations with this divine Truth: that particularly the *Stoics*, professing themselves wise, and relying too much on the strength of their own reason, changed the truth of God, or the true notion of the Deity, and worshipped the creature rather than the Creator: the effect of which was, that the *Epicureans* changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and then gave themselves up to all manner of licentiousness.

The design of the Gospel is to rectify these gross errors. And in this sense I take *Christianity to be as old as the creation*: because it revives that doctrine, which was taught men in the beginning.

I am of the same opinion with regard to the belief of the soul's immortality, the other pillar of true religion. And I hope to convince you, that this doctrine also proceeded originally from revelation, and was handed down by tradition. And in proof of this I shall confine my self, almost
G 2 wholly,

wholly, to the same *Cicero*, and chiefly to *Tusc. q. l. 1.*

I am aware, that your author will give me a short answer, to all that I can collect from thence, by telling me, that *Cicero* had not the least notion of such a revelation: which I readily grant. But please to consider, that, whosoever confirms a truth, without knowing he does so, is therefore a better evidence, because impartial. Your Author can have no room to say, "That *Cicero* was bound, for the sake of his maintenance, to maintain this doctrine, that maintained him." This jingle can have no place here. And if there be any thing in his distinction between *Cicero* as priest, and philosopher: and if his assertion be right, that tho' the priest thought fit to dissemble; yet the philosopher not only knew, but spoke the truth, he must admit, that what *Cicero* says, under this head, is true: for he professes to write this piece meerly as a philosopher, to entertain himself in his retirement, after the ruin of that great republic, in which he once had made the greatest figure. It was to divert himself under that common, and heavy calamity, that he collected the opinions of the *Grecian* philosophers. What he says here is no more than a transcript from them: and I will allow, that they knew as little of revelation as *Cicero*. This

This piece is written on the contempt of death, by way of dialogue, between *Cicero*, and one who thought that death was something evil. When he had sufficiently bantered his opponent, on the absurdity of the expression, and had brought him to wish, that, when the soul departed from the body, it did not perish, but return to heaven, as to its proper habitation, he begins thus.

Auctoribus quidem ad istam sententiam, quam vis obtineri, uti optimis possumus, quod in omnibus causis & debet & solet valere plurimum: & primum quidem omni antiquitate, quæ, quo proprius aberat ab ortu & divina progenie, hoc melius ea, fortasse, quæ erant vera, cernebat.

This is his first argument, which, you see, is taken from authority. He is so well pleased with this sort of proof, that he pursues it, as far as his books could furnish him with facts. I shall abridge what he says, lay it before you in one View, and then consider it. He goes on thus :

Hence those antients, whom *Ennius* calls *Casci*, were firmly persuaded, that there was sense in death, and that man did not perish wholly, by the departure of life. Then he goes on to the pontifical laws, and to the ceremonies of sepulture, which, says he, men of the greatest parts would not have either observed themselves, with
so

so much care, or punished the violators of them, with so much severity, if there had not been settled in their minds an opinion, that death was not a total destruction, but only a change of life, and an introducer of good men into heaven. Hence, as he goes on, *Romulus, Hercules, &c.* came to be Deified, and heaven almost filled with mankind.

When he comes to the latter ages, whose history was better known, he tells us, that *Phærecydes Syrus* first said, that human souls were immortal, *quod litteris exstet*, the first whom the *Grecian* authors gave any account of. He was cotemporary with *Thales*. I give you the next Paragraph in his own words.

Hanc opinionem discipulus ejus Pythagoras maxime confirmavit: qui, cum, superbo regnante, in Italiam venisset, tenuit magnam illam Greciam, cum honore, & disciplina, tum etiam auctoritate. I desire you to take notice of this last word auctoritate: What the meaning of it is, Cicero himself explains, in his preface to de Nat. Deor. Quin etiam obest plerumq; iis, qui discere volunt, Auctoritas eorum, qui se docere profitentur: desunt enim suum judicium adhibere: id habent ratum, quod ab eo, quem probant, judicatum vident. Nec vero probare soleo id, quod de Pythagoricis accepimus, quos ferunt, si quid affirmarent in disputando, cum ex iis quereretur,

reretur, quare ita esset? respondere solitos: Ipse dixit, *ipse autem erat Pythagoras.* I produce this only to shew what Cicero meant by *Auctoritate*, in the forecited passage. I confess that Cicero gives his opinion here, as an Academic, against all Authority: but at the same time he tells us plainly, that the *Pythagoreans* looked upon *ipse dixit*, their master's word, to be the strongest proof. This was the *Authority* by which *Pythagoras* propagated his Doctrine in *Italy*. What he had learnt in the East he taught his Disciples: and they, in like manner, communicated it to others, as they had received it from him.

Cicero says, that *Plato* went into *Italy*, on purpose to become acquainted with the *Pythagoreans*: that he conversed there with *Archytas*, *Timæus*, and many others, from whom he learnt all the doctrines of *Pythagoras*, particularly that of the soul's immortality: and that he was the first, who gave his reasons for it. Thus it was that *Plato* learnt his, almost, divine truths, as Dr. Clark calls them.

Plato's vast fund of learning furnished stock enough for others to set up. They, who succeeded him, began to form systems of Philosophy, and, by degrees, to argue themselves into a disbelief of what they had learnt from *Plato*, only because they could not, says Cicero, comprehend an un-

bodied soul, *qualis sit animus vacuus corpore.*

Give me leave now to consider *Cicero's* argument drawn from authority, which uses to carry, as he says, the greatest weight with it, and that justly to, in all manner of causes.

This is his first argument, and therefore one he thought very well of, else he had not placed it here. For *Cicero* must be allowed to have known how to range his arguments to the best advantage: and it was ever a rule with him to begin with such, as would engage the attention of his hearers.

But pray observe the reason he gives, why antiquity carries with it the greatest authority, *viz.* because the less removed men were from the beginning, and from the divine progeny, the better they could perceive what was true.

Now this reason must, as I conceive, be founded on one of these two suppositions: either that men had at first a clearer discernment of things, than they had in latter ages; or that God, at the beginning, made this revelation to man.

But the very next section plainly shews, that *Cicero* had not the least imagination, that men were more knowing at first, than they were afterwards. For, by way of accounting, how the Antients came by
this

this opinion of the soul's immortality, he says. *Sed qui nondum ea, quæ multis post annis tractari cœpissent, physica didicissent, tantum sibi persuaserant, quantum, natura admonente, cognoverant: rationes et causas rerum non tenebant.* Here Cicero represents the first ages as rude and ignorant: he tells us, that they had not, as yet, attained to the knowledge of the causes and reasons of things: and that, therefore, they could not possibly come at this opinion, by the help of what was not found out till many ages after. This by the way is a flat contradiction to your Author's grand assertion. Cicero is positive, that men had this belief long before they began to reason about it. And therefore his ascribing the greatest Authority in this case to the earliest ages can really be founded on this only, that God revealed this truth to the first Man. And, upon this supposition, you may easily conceive, that, the nearer men were to the divine progeny, or the first man, the more likely they were to retain the Tradition uncorrupt.

I am aware of an Objection, your Author may make to the last cited paragraph, which is, that Cicero ascribes this belief of the antients to the admonition of nature.

Whatever Cicero means by it, I desire you to take notice, that he intends something, distinct from a knowledge of the

H

causes

causes and reasons of things, and prior to it. And therefore it cannot serve your Author's purpose, whether it be to mine or not. If you permit me to transcribe a passage or two, where he has the same thought, in different words, I believe I shall be able to shew you clearly, what idea Cicero annexes to this expression: *Quantum natura admonente cognoverant.*

In the period immediately following the last mentioned, and which he brings in confirmation of it, he says: *Ut porro firmissimum hoc afferri videtur, cur Deos esse credamus: quod nulla gens tam fera, nemo omnium tam sit immanis, cujus mentem non imbuerit Deorum opinio. Multi de diis prava sentiunt: id enim vitioso more effici solet: omnibus tamen esse vim, et naturam divinam arbitrantur. Nec vero id collocutio hominum, aut consensus efficit: non institutis opinio est confirmata, non legibus. Omni autem in eo consensus omnium gentium, lex naturæ putanda est.*

In *de Nat. Deor.* Cicero has a passage to the same purpose, which he puts into the mouth of Velleius, to prove the being of the Gods. *Quod in omnium animis eorum notionem impressisset ipsa natura. Quæ est enim gens, aut quod genus hominum, quod non habeat, sine doctrina, antiquitatem quandam Deorum.*

In both passages the assertion is the same, viz. That the belief of a God was before all institution and learning: and the proof thereof is unanswerable: because the most barbarous nations have this belief. But how came men by it? for this is what I am now enquiring after. In the first citation it is said: There is no nation so wild, whose minds were not *stained* with the belief of God: in the next 'tis said, that nature herself had impressed the notion on the minds of men. These expressions are borrowed from the dier, and engraver: and made use of to signify some notions, so fastned in mens minds, by nature, as not to be worn out.

This then is the way, that *Cicero* supposes the antients came by the knowledge of the soul's immortality, when he says they had it, by the admonition of nature: this is sometimes called innate ideas.

But, whether there be such ideas, or not, which I shall not now dispute, yet it is manifest, that the belief of the soul's immortality could not be such an indelible stain or impression of nature, because we know it was worn out.

The *Grecian* Philosophers, from whom *Cicero* borrowed all this, could not avoid observing, that the belief of the soul's immortality had spread itself over the whole human race, even before the dauning of

philosophy. And, being at a loss to account for it, on principles they knew, they ascribed it to nature, as to some occult quality: that they might not seem to be ignorant of, what they really knew nothing of.

This solution of theirs puts me in mind of their astronomy. They had observed the various motions of the stars: as that some of them were fixed, or seemed to move together; and that others were wanderers, as having distinct and irregular motions: and their observations were so just, that they had calculated their motions, with sufficient exactness. But, having lost the system that *Pythagoras* taught*, and, taking the earth to be the center of motion, they gave a very clumsy solution of these appearances: which made *Alphonso*, king of *Castile*, say, as it is reported, that, if he had been to advise the Creator, the world had been made in a better manner. The expression is too shocking to admit an excuse. And yet there lies a truth at the bottom of it, which those, who declaimed loudest against it, knew nothing of.

The Case was this. The royal Astronomer had studied the *Ptolemaic* System, which was conveyed by the *Arabs* into *Europe*, as they had received it from these

* Diog. Laert. in vit. Pyth.

very *Greek* Philosophers. His good sense perceived that their solution was wrong, tho' he was at a loss how to give a better. But had that *Castilian* monarch lived since the revival, and confirmation of the old *Pythagorean* System, his complaints had been turned into raptures. For now he would have seen all that, which gave him offence, explained in an easy and natural way.

And I make no doubt but that you, and all, who are desirous of finding out truth, will be pleased with the like plain solution of that universal belief, of the soul's immortality, which the *Grecian* Philosophers endeavoured, in vain, to account for, by ascribing it to a tincture or impression of nature.

The fact stands thus. That men believed the soul's immortality, before they began to reason about it: that all men believed it, even the most barbarous: that, tho' all agreed in the general belief, yet, when they came to give a description of the state of immortality, their several descriptions appeared to be, not only different, but some of them to be inconsistent with one another: and, that, after philosophy had taught men to reason upon the Causes of things, many were of opinion, that the soul perished with the body.

The *Greek* Philosophers explained this belief, by saying, It was an impression of nature.

nature. Nature is an ambiguous word: sometimes they take it for the cause; sometimes for the effect: but they still supposed it to be something necessary, which ever way they understood it. And we find human nature, call it either cause or effect, to be the same now, that it was in the days of *Pythagoras*; the same in *America*, as in *Greece*. All men have the same desires, and all have the same reason, or rule of judging: the same in kind, tho' not in degree: the rule is the same, tho' all are not equally ready to apply it.

But the belief of the soul's immortality is not the same in all ages and nations: and therefore it cannot be an impression of nature. If your Author should tell me, that mens reasoning vary, as much as their belief: yet, I hope, he will not affirm, that mankind ever reasoned themselves out of all reason.

But I am not immediately engaged with your Author at present. I am now only observing, that whatever is natural to us, whether reason or appetite, is still the same, in all ages and nations: but that the belief of the soul's immortality is different, in different places, and times; and has been even quite obliterated in some; and therefore it cannot be accounted for on natural principles.

But

But there is an easy solution of all these various appearances, by supposing, that God revealed this truth to the first man, who communicated it to his children, and so to posterity.

Now, upon this supposition, the belief of the soul's immortality is not natural, nor contrary to nature, but something above nature. Perhaps bare human reason could never have discovered it: but now it is revealed, it appears so agreeable to human nature, that every rational creature must be pleased with the thoughts, that he is made to live for ever: unless a consciousness of guilt makes him dread an eternity of woe and misery.

Give me leave to compare this revelation to the generous benefaction of a Lord to his Vassal, by means whereof the Vassal enjoys larger privileges, than the nature of his tenure could demand. And, as it often happens in such cases, that the gift is preserved, tho' the reason, and manner of the donation be lost; and that no other proof remains, but that of prescription: so it fared here. The original revelation was turned into tradition, and believed meerly on the authority of the relator.

This supposition will solve all those appearances, which the impression of nature could not do. You will now see plainly

plainly how men came by this belief, before they began to reason about it: how it came to be varied in different nations: and why some men reasoned themselves entirely out of it.

For, as it proceeded from revelation, men may well be supposed to have believed it, long before they knew how to convince themselves by argument, that the soul is immortal. I look upon revelation to be like a guide to travellers, in the dark, in a strange country. 'Tis barely possible, that one of a thousand, in such a case, might have groped out the way, tho' with much difficulty; but a guide saves all this trouble, and conducts those in the right way, who otherwise never could have found it.

Nor will you wonder, that different nations came to give different descriptions of a future state, when you consider, that the revelation was turned into tradition, and that men dispersed themselves over the face of the whole earth, without letters, and without commerce with each other. We have a like instance in languages, where the difference shall be so great, that one man shall not understand what the other says, and yet an Etymologist can trace both languages up to the same common mother tongue. Letters are the best preservers of facts, as well as words. For,
without

without them, all is conveyed by the ear, and trusted to the memory. When you reflect on the manner of handing down this truth, of the soul's immortality, you will be so far from being offended at its variation: that you will rather wonder, why the least remembrance of it was left among illiterate nations. It must needs be something, which they took to be of the utmost concern, that could fix itself in the treacherous memories of those, who were not able to give the least account of their own history a few ages back.

And as this belief was handed down, merely on the credit of the relator, you will not be surprized to hear, that when the *Grecian* wits came to form systems of philosophy, they took themselves to be too wise to regard authority: and that, as they reason'd on false principles, they came to lay aside that belief, which had, till then, made its way from the creation.

Thus you see, that this hypothesis, of a revelation made to the first man, and thence handed down to posterity, gives an easy solution of those facts, which *Cicero*, and the *Grecian* philosophers could not account for: and therefore they are unexceptionable evidence: because they allow of those facts which cannot be explained on any other.

I

I have

I have here a large field, opening it self before me, which I have but just entered, and where a curious antiquary will find an agreeable entertainment, in collecting those several remains, that lie scattered about it. Had man continued in his original innocence, there would have been no need of this sort of enquiry now. It is like searching into the rubbish of a stately pile, that fell many ages since, and whose very ruins are almost perished. When a man, who has some history of the place, and notion of the architecture, comes to view it, he will, at first, meet with the discouragement, to see the clowns plowing, where that once superb building stood, and despising the frusts that lie in their way; and to be derided by those rustics, for admiring, what they take to be of no worth. But when he comes to compare the several dispersed fragments with one another, to explain the nature of that edifice, in which they had stood, and to shew of what excellent service they still are, if properly made use of: their derision will be justly turned upon themselves, for having so long neglected things of so great value. This is an undertaking to which I must own my self far unequal. But if a great genius will be at the pains to gather together all these broken pieces, and to place them in a proper light, I am persuaded, that he will

will be an instrument of Providence, to bring men back from their infidelity, and to reclaim a dissolute world.

Your Author, to frighten men from such an enquiry, tells us, * *That they, who, to magnify revelation, weaken the force of the religion of reason and nature, strike at all religion.*

If his arguments were as strong as his assertions, there would be no resisting them. The first is this. *Whatever is true by reason, can never be false by revelation.* The next is that inverted. *To suppose any thing can be true by revelation, which is false by reason, is not to support that thing, but to undermine revelation.*

Let us compare these arguments with what now lies before us. That the Soul is immortal is a proposition, which your Author professes at present to believe. Now it is evident, from what I have transcribed out of *Cicero*, first, That there was a time, when men believed this proposition, without troubling themselves to reason about it: then it was true *by revelation*, but neither true nor false *by reason*. In the next place it appears that *Plato*, who received this truth by tradition, was so well pleased with it, that he would not be contented with a bare belief of it, as

* C. 12. †

those before him were: but he set himself to prove it *by reason*: in which he was so much in earnest, and produced so many arguments, that he seemed to *Cicero* † to be desirous to convince others, and that he undoubtedly convinced himself, that the soul was immortal: here the same proposition was true both *by revelation and by reason*. Last of all, the *Stoics* found out *by reason*, as they thought, that there was no immaterial substance, and, consequently, that human souls were mortal, in which they were followed by *Epicurus*, and all his numerous tribe: here this proposition was, in their opinion, *false by reason*, tho' at the same time it was *true by revelation*.

And I will make one inference more from hence, *viz.* that the same thing may be *true and false by reason*. For, when *Plato* argued about the soul's immortality, it seemed very reasonable to him, that it was immortal; and when *Zeno* formed his system, it appeared as reasonable to him, that the soul was mortal. But must the state of the soul depend on these men's reasonings? or must it not be ever the same however they reasoned about it? If reason was always perfect, as your Author would persuade us, it could never vary: and that, which appeared once to be true, must al-

† *Tuf. q. l. 1.*

ways appear so. This proposition, that the soul is immortal, must be ever either true or false. If it was true before the *Stoic* philosophy began, it was not false afterwards; and if it was false, when *Stoicism* flourished, it could not be true before. When reason is thus against reason, it is impossible for both sides to be true: and if so, how can the religion of reason be perfect?

Or how can it be such a standard of perfection, that * *if any instituted religion varies from it in any particular, nay in the minutest circumstance, that alone is an argument, which makes all things else that can be said for its support totally ineffectual?* For, if there be any truth in instituted religion, it must seem to vary from the religion of reason: because that is ever varying from itself: As an immoveable object will seem to change its situation to a spectator always in motion. But I shall press this no farther, for your Author tells us, that by his perfect, invariable † religion of reason, he does not mean, that *all should have equal knowledge, but that all should have sufficient for the circumstances they are in.*

But how consistent is this with his grand argument, pretending to prove, from the perfection of God, that the religion of rea-

* C. 6.

† C. 11.

son is absolutely perfect? are there degrees of perfection? and are all those degrees equally perfect?

Your learned Author would take it very much amiss of me, if I so much as suspected, that he took the pains to write this elaborate treatise, meerly to convince Christians, that all men are accountable according to their knowledge. He is not such a stranger to the book, he so much despises, as not to know we find that truth there, is without much search or study. We are told, *Luke xii. 48.*— *Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.*

This is not one of those things, that are delivered in an *hyperbolical manner*: it is as plain, and simple as one of the *Maxims of Confutius*. We all knew this, and believed to be true, before your Author's book was published. We believe that all reasonable creatures are accountable to God: and we believe also that his infinite justice expects no more from them, than in proportion to the knowledge he has given them. If this be the *eternal law* he talks of, we readily grant it: and he might have spared himself the trouble he has taken to convince us of it. He very well knew that we allowed all this, and therefore this cannot be the doctrine he is so desirous to propagate.

Were

Were strangers to what passed in the ages before them, which are the greater part of mankind, to form their judgment from your Author's book, and sure he hopes they will, else he had never wrote it: when they see him labouring to prove an universal religion, which has subsisted from the creation: when they find him assuring them, with the utmost earnestness, that if there be a God, and if that God be good, there must be such a religion: when they observe under how much concern he is, that all men should be thought to have been without this religion, for four thousand years together: when they see how angry he is with Christianity, for pretending to teach, what all mankind knew before: can they think that he meant no more by all this, than only to tell them, That every man should be judged according to his knowledge?

The man, who knows how to touch the passions, so well as your Author does, would never have put himself to the expence of so much art and toil, to raise mens expectations to so great an height, only to attend to a proposition, they never doubted of.

His apparent intention was to give them a very different idea. The vulgar notion you know of religion is, that it is the divine command, publickly taught and believed.

lieved. Now when they hear the words, *religion, eternal, unchangeable*, continually rung in their ears, they will be apt to believe, because they cannot contradict it, that your Author's *perfect religion of reason* has been openly professed, without any variation, in all ages, and nations, from the creation down to Christianity. And indeed, if this were true, your Author's argument would be really strong. For where a perfect religion is already taught, and believed universally, there can be no need of a new religion.

I have a better opinion of your Author's judgment, than to think, he can impose upon himself, or hope to impose upon others, with such arguments. As he must needs see the fallacy himself, so his good sense will teach him, that others may see it too. They, indeed, whom the glare of his argument can dazzle, are so far gained, as to become Anti-christians, which is no small conquest. But his master-piece lies in making so close a connection between the very being of a God, and this unalterable religion, that they must both stand or fall together. He argues thus: if there be a God, he has given men a perfect invariable religion: and at the same time he confesses, that religion has been ever varying.

He

He tells you it is not prudent to speak out. For my part I think he has spoken out plainly, and boldly enough, in every point, but this: and here he has, with the utmost art, thrown over his secret thoughts so fine a vail, that you may easily see through it.

Et fugit ad salices & se cupit ante videri.

I own to you, I can see no other aim he could have, in sending this book into the world, than to make profelytes to Atheism.

Where is it he has shewn his *prudent concealment*, except in this very point? He has plainly attacked Christianity, without the least ceremony. The very title of his book is a manifest sneer. His thesis is, that *Christianity is as old as the Creation*: his argument to prove it is this: *If Christianity be the only true religion, then it is as old as the Creation.* But how does he prove Christianity to be a true religion? only by making it appear in the most odious, and ridiculous manner, he possibly can, to the vulgar libertine. I am sure you will not insist on my transcribing any of those passages: that I may not be a means of publishing his blasphemy farther, which must needs be shocking even to the ears of a *Deist* of any modesty.

And yet your Author is so well pleased with his performance, that he cannot for-

bear bragging of it, *Have not I*, says he, *shewn some resolution, in daring to attack the darling weaknesses and follies of false Christians?* He is so far from thinking it not safe to expose the Scriptures, that he scarce uses a softening expression. But, in advancing his beloved notion, he thought it not safe to speak out. As he has shewn his resolution, in daring to attack Christianity; so he has shewn his prudence, in laying his venom in such a concealed manner, as to poison others, without endangering himself.

This outrage on those sacred Oracles, which, confessedly, give the strongest discountenance to vice, and encouragement to virtue, by laying before us the greatest punishments, and rewards, that a rational being is capable of receiving, seems, to me, plainly to betray a guilt, which wants to free itself from an after reckoning. What other motive, think you, could he possibly have, to induce him to throw out so much blasphemy?

Had he been a Protestant, who could not, on account of some scruples, conform to the Church of *England*, he might have joined himself to any congregation of Protestant dissenters. He is so far from complaining of any restraint that way, that he is very well pleased to find, *that we are now blessed with liberty.*

He

He might, if he had pleased, have made himself a member of *the primitive Episcopal Church of Scotland*, which he commends so much: or, if they believe the Gospel too literally to please him,

He might have become one of the good people called Quakers, who, by the help of an allegory, take off entirely the edge of the *killing letter*. He says their principles are rational. I cannot suppose, that a man of his penetration in religious matters, would say this, without good grounds, which, by the way, confirms me in an opinion, that the Quakers really are, what your Author pretends to be: and his not joining with them makes me strongly suspect, that I have guessed right at his opinion. With the Quakers he might have indulged an humor, which seems to be predominant in him, of railing at the Clergy. Here he might have run over all the topics of steeple houses, tithes, church maintenance, repealing the statute of Mortmain, Queen *Ann's* bounty, and what else he pleased: and, what he had said, would have been received by the friends, with an applauding groan.

If that ugly brat of theirs, *the light within*, gave him offence: it had been benevolent in him, who talks so much of benevolence, to have tried to make them quit that *senseless notion*, which, as he says,

can serve only to prejudice people against their, otherwise, rational principles. This had been an undertaking worthy himself; and, if he could have brought this to bear, he would have merited more than their apostles *Fox* and *Naylor*.

If he had liked none of the several sects of protestant dissenters, now in being, he might, if he had thought fit, set up a sect of his own, as a certain orator has lately done, and he might have given his sect the title of his book, which would have made his Christianity look more primitive than the primitive Christianity itself.

Or, had he been a meer Deist, it had been not only ungrateful in him, to rail at that religion, from whence he borrowed his best notions (for modern Deism is nothing else but Christianity philosophized) but he could not avoid seeing, that he is opposing his own design, in falling, so foul as he does, on Christianity, especially as now professed in the Church of *England*, where it is, as he confesses, *debarred from all exercise of Tyranny*. When a Deist speaks against a religion so qualified, he speaks against the very thing he would promote. For every true Christian is a real Deist, and with this advantage, that he not only believes all the Deists Creed, but he believes it on such principles, as will, at least in his own opinion, make him obey the precepts of
virtue,

virtue, with much more attention than a Deist. Now, if all his aim, by recommending Deism, be to promote virtue, which is all he pretends to, and if an *English* Christian believes, what will promote it, as fully as Deism can, and is, at the same time, *debarred from exercising all acts of tyranny*, the Deist surely has what he desires.

But, whatever may be his private thoughts, which must be left to that Omniscient Spirit, who, alone, knows the secrets of our souls: yet his apparent aim is to abolish Christianity. Supposing then, what I hope will never happen, that he could quite destroy the authority of revelation, and let all men loose, to their own guidance: what the consequence of that will be, your Author must know, if ever he did read the book he recommends. The *Stoics* came not behind him in boasting of the perfection of reason: they said their wise man was equal to God himself, in every thing, but immortality: and yet, you see, what wretched work they made with their unerring wisdom.

Indeed if all rational creatures had exactly the same capacities, and if all would make the same use of them, human reason would be so far perfect, that all would think in the same manner: and then, whatever were the opinions of men, they would not differ.

But

But the fact is directly contrary. Mens capacities are infinitely various, and so must be their notions too. Admitting then, that some could demonstrate, by the bare use of their reason, the being and attributes of God, and the soul's immortality; yet the bulk of mankind is so far from being able to do this, that few, in comparison of the whole, have capacities enough to understand even the force of a demonstration; tho', at the same time, they are all capable, in some degree, of assenting to a truth when delivered to them, as to this: that there is a God, who governs the world, and will reward, or punish us, either in this or the life to come.

Now, this being the case, the far greater part must rely on authority: which is the very faith, that gives your Author so much displeasure, and from which Christian faith differs only in this: that he would have us believe in man, and we believe in God.

And which of these will have the greatest influence on mens lives? If we should allow the Deist, that human reason could, of itself, discover all those truths, which God has revealed to us; and that the only end of those truths is to make us good, and consequently, happy in this world. Even upon this supposition, which,
think

think you, would make a deeper impression in mens minds, the belief, that this is the law of God? or a persuasion that it is [only the opinion of men? He, who believes the former, can have no room to doubt the truth of what he believes; but he, who takes his faith on human credit, can have no such assurance. The very notion of a Deity carries awe and dread with it, but we make free with one another, as with equals.

When I consider with my self, that great reverence, which all men have for whatever they think comes from God: I cannot forbear concluding, that the allwise Creator formed men thus, on purpose to make us attend to those truths, which he should reveal to us.

And I am apt to think, that our modern philosophers are under a great mistake, in supposing, that, because they now can give satisfactory reasons for the Deists creed, therefore men might always have done so, and thence infer that they ever did. We learn these truths by revelation, and then assign reasons for our belief. But I doubt, that, if they had never been revealed, they had not as yet been discovered.

Plato was the first, that gave reasons for the soul's immortality: but he believed it, before he began to reason about it. Reasoning

soning was not the cause, but the effect of his belief; and, when, afterwards, reason had thrust out authority, the doctrine of the soul's immortality was soon extinguished, and men wandered about in endless mazes, without a guide.

When the *Stoics* had, by their reasoning, argued themselves out of all notions of a future state, they tried to influence mens lives by asserting, that Providence rewards or punishes in this life. But here fact being, too often, directly against their argument, they were laughed at even by the *Epicureans*, who called the *Stoical* providence a fortune-telling old woman.

Thus what the *Stoics* left undone, with their reasoning, the *Epicurean* reasoning finished: and, all notions of religion being now quite erased, they substituted in the room of it self interest, as the only principle of action *.

And so does your Author, where he pretends to prove, † *That the not adhering to those notions, reason dictates, concerning the nature of God, has been the occasion of all superstition, &c.* and his proof of this is to ridicule the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Sacrifice of Christ: to which he joins, with much art, the *Spanish* inquisition: and from thence takes occasion to

* Vide Ciceronem de finibus, l. 1. 2.

† C. 8.

rail at bigotry, which, as it stands there, is but another word for Christianity, and then adds:

So that his [the bigots, or Christians] notion of a God and religion serve only to make him infinitely a worse man than if he had been without any belief. For then he could have no motives from the next world for doing mischief: nor could his disbelief strip him of his humanity, or hinder him, if he judged rightly of his own interest, from acting so by his fellow creatures, as taking in the whole of his life, was best for him to do.

This is the true principle of an Atheist, which your Author sets up, in opposition to the belief of a Christian, and which he recommends as more conducive to the good of mankind. It is a principle, that flows from the utmost dissolution of all virtue, and fit only for the conduct of little tricksters: fit only for those who are strangers to every generous act; and who have the weakness to hope, that their low artifice will pass undiscovered.

I had once thoughts of giving this principle a full answer. But, having already tired you with a long epistle, I shall at present say only this: that it is well for mankind we are not all directed by the same motive only.

For, if we were, there could be then no such thing in reality as virtue: there
L
could

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could be then neither an uncorrupt magistrate, nor a dutiful subject: neither a faithful friend, nor a good neighbour: In short no man would then practise either truth, or honesty, or any other act of humanity, any longer than it suited with each one's private conveniency. I am,

7 JU 66

SIR,

Your obedient Servant,

Newton Ferrers,
April 25, 1733.

W. WILLIAMS



